

**Randy Thurston
Vice President, City Council
Pueblo, Colorado**

**Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on Water & Power Resources,
United States House of Representatives**

**Oversight Field Hearing: “*Colorado: Options to Increase Water Supply
and Improve Efficiencies.*”**

December 12, 2003

Before the Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources

**Testimony on Behalf of the City of Pueblo, Colorado,
Randy Thurston, Vice President, Pueblo City Council**

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The severe drought conditions that struck Colorado and other regions of the arid West in 2002, have made it clear that additional water storage in the state, in combination with sensible growth management, and increased water conservation and use efficiency, is necessary to provide a reliable future water supply for the State's increasing population and to meet competing demands for water. Regional cooperation to identify and develop appropriate projects is required. Reasonable mitigation of detrimental impacts will be necessary. In Southeastern Colorado, new efforts are being made on a regional basis, to implement cooperative approaches to the complex issues and competing interests implicated by new water storage projects. While it is too early to determine whether these efforts will be successful, Pueblo remains hopeful that through these and similar efforts, appropriate balances can be struck to match the benefits of proposed water projects with acceptable levels of local, environmental and other impacts.

I. PUEBLO/SOUTHEASTERN COLORADO

Pueblo is a community of approximately 105,000 people located on the semi-arid plain in Southeastern Colorado. Pueblo serves as the medical, financial, retail and cultural center for 350,000 people from the Continental Divide east to Kansas, and from the City of Fountain south to the New Mexico border. Located at the confluence of the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek, Pueblo has been an important trading and population center for over 300 years. The Arkansas River has always been an important part of the City, due to its prominent role in commerce and industry, as a source of water for the community, and as the peaceful riparian habitat enhancing the urban core of the City adjacent to our City parks, river trails and nature center.

Water in Colorado is obviously a scarce and precious resource. In a state where over 80% of the population is located on the eastern slope of the Continental Divide and over 80% of the moisture is located on the western slope of the Divide - getting the water to the people is often a complicated and controversial task. Most of the moisture in Colorado falls in the form of snow during the winter months. During the warming days of spring, rivers and creeks quickly fill to capacity. Storage of the peak spring runoff is crucial to the reliability of water supplies in Colorado. Water storage can benefit municipal, agricultural, and recreational interests, alike.

Pueblo and southeastern Colorado have been fortunate to benefit from several Bureau of Reclamation storage and diversion projects. These projects have brought water to thirsty Front Range communities and farms as well as providing needed water storage to the western slope of Colorado. Before these projects, farmers working the

fertile soils in the region had water for the initial part of the growing season, but not all of the growing season. The Fryingpan-Arkansas Project, part of which is Pueblo Reservoir located less than 10 miles upstream from Pueblo, was completed in 1975. Project facilities are used for storage of both project and non-project water. In general, the project brings surplus water from the western slope of Colorado to southeastern Colorado. The project also includes western slope storage facilities, such as Ruedi Reservoir.

II. ENLARGEMENT OF PUEBLO RESERVOIR

The recently proposed enlargement of Pueblo Reservoir well illustrates the complexities and difficulties associated with new water storage projects in Colorado. Even before the 2002 drought, Pueblo Reservoir was the focus of efforts to increase water storage on the Arkansas River. These efforts were and continue to be directed by the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, and supported by the cities of Colorado Springs, Aurora, and other primarily municipal interests. The Pueblo Board of Water Works also is a strong supporter of the project. The Southeastern District anticipates that the Bureau of Reclamation will also be a partner in this expansion effort.

While recognizing the value and need for additional water storage, the Pueblo City Council has consistently voiced concerns with any increase in the storage capacity of Pueblo Reservoir that results in significant diminishment of the flow of the Arkansas River through the City, located only a few miles below the dam. As a result, Pueblo opposed (including in hearings held before this Subcommittee in March 2002), proposed federal legislation contemplating enlargement of water storage space in Pueblo Reservoir, because the legislation did not include enforceable mechanisms to protect reasonable minimum flows through the City. Pueblo's concerns focused on the fact that while the lion's share of the benefits of the increased storage would accrue to distantly located municipalities, the project's detrimental impacts would most heavily burden Pueblo. These impacts include reductions in flows that diminish the value of the River as an important and irreplaceable amenity for the City and its residents, and impacts to the City's on-going efforts in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers to restore riparian habitat and enhance river-related recreation through Pueblo.

As a general matter, Pueblo agrees that increased utilization and expansion of existing storage projects is preferable to the construction of new projects. From a water supplier standpoint, expansions can be accomplished more quickly, with less time and resources expended on permitting efforts and at a lower cost per acre foot of water storage than new projects.

Since Pueblo's testimony in 2002, several positive developments have occurred. As an initial step, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, the Southeastern District, and both the Lower and Upper Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy Districts reached agreement on a set of common water-related goals and principles that are intended to provide the general framework for cooperative decision-making regarding Arkansas River Valley water matters. These "Arkansas River Water Preservation Goals and Principles" were

finalized in September 2003. The City Councils of Pueblo and Colorado Springs are working more closely together than ever before on water issues, as a result, and Pueblo commends and recognizes the new leadership in Colorado Springs that has facilitated this. While Pueblo's on-going concerns with the proposed legislation relating to Pueblo Reservoir have not yet been resolved, the Cities are working hard to reach specific agreement on these and related issues that would permit the legislation to go forward. The Pueblo City Council is optimistic that these efforts will ultimately be successful and that a "win-win" result can soon be achieved.

Pueblo remains committed to pursuing an appropriate, cooperative resolution of the issues that will allow for increased water storage opportunities in Pueblo Reservoir to improve water supply reliability, while protecting the interest of Pueblo and its residents in preserving appropriate minimum flow levels in the Arkansas River through Pueblo. Additional time is necessary, however, to allow the affected state interests to develop an appropriate solution, and federal legislation mandating specific actions in the advance of local agreement could chill the new cooperation.

III. CONCLUSION

The proposed expansion of the Fryingpan-Arkansas project provides an example of the complexities and difficulties associated with new water storage projects in Colorado. Recognition of the competing uses and values of water in an evolving Colorado, and cooperation at the regional and local levels is necessary for such projects to become a reality. Federal action that would discourage such cooperation, or which fails to recognize the necessity for a reasonable balance of the various competing interests, will serve only to shift the focus of discussion from problem-solving at the negotiating table, to the types of legal and permitting wrangle that historically plagued projects like Two Forks and Animas-La Plata.

DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENT
Required by House Rule XI, clause 2(g)
and Rules of the Committee on Resources

A. This part is to be completed by all witnesses:

1. Name: Randy Thurston, Vice President, Pueblo City Council
2. Business Address: One City Hall Place
Pueblo, CO 81003
3. Business Phone Number: (719) 553-2655
4. Organization you are representing: City of Pueblo, Colorado
5. Any training or educational certificates, diplomas or degrees or other educational experiences which add to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing:
6. Any professional licenses, certifications, or affiliations held which are relevant to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing:

Member of the committee, which included representatives from the City of Pueblo, the City of Colorado Springs, the Pueblo Board of Water Works, the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District, the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District, and the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, that drafted the Arkansas River Water Preservation Principles.

Currently negotiating water policy with the City of Colorado Springs and other entities.

7. Any employment, occupation, ownership in a firm or business, or work-related experiences which relate to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing:
8. Any offices, elected positions, or representational capacity held in the organization on whose behalf you are testifying:
Vice President of Pueblo City Council
Chairman of Pueblo Area Council of Governments

B. To be completed by nongovernmental witnesses only:

1. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which you have received since October 1, 2000, from the **Department of the Interior**, the source and the amount of each grant or contract:
2. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which were received since October 1, 2000, from the **Department of the Interior** by the organization(s) which you represent at this hearing,

including the source and amount of each grant or contract:

3. Any other information you wish to convey which might aid the members of the Committee to better understand the context of your testimony:

Resume

Randy Thurston

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Pueblo, Colorado 81005
Home (719) 566-1911

EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Owned largest real estate and property management company in Pueblo for 11 years before selling in October 2001
- Chosen Business Leader of the Year in 1999 both in Colorado and nationwide by FBLA
- Played major role in developing Arkansas River Water Preservation Principles
- City Council Member, District 3 (current Vice-President) – Term: January 1, 2002 through December 31, 2005

EDUCATION:

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, South High School, Pueblo, Colorado.

MEMBERSHIPS:

- Current Vice-President, Pueblo City Council
- Current Chairman, Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG)
- Planning & Zoning Commission
- Urban Renewal Authority

PERSONAL REFERENCES:

Available upon request